

## How to Escape Thucydides's Trap: A Dialogue among Sages

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### Abstract – d4

This paper will review Sun Tzu and Thucydides first, but then Confucius, Lao Tzu and several other sages carefully, seeking ancient insight to help solve contemporary global security issues. Sun Tzu wrote his incomparable "Art of War" during what many civilizationalists and world historians call the "axial age."<sup>1</sup> It was a "Warring States" period in China, and a time of deep thinking and conceptual evolution around the world. Sun Tzu was roughly contemporary with Thucydides of Greece, who recorded a catastrophic war between Sparta and Athens in 404 BCE, leading to the decline of Greek civilization entire as Rome rose. A dialogue between Sun Tzu and Thucydides about eternal security issues could be enhanced by consulting Confucius, Lao Tzu, Von Clausewitz, and some less famous but more recent others like Graham Allison.<sup>2,3</sup> Even Jesus might be relevant, although he came four centuries later and did not make his mark being an officer of armies. Jesus certainly had strong opinions about the utilities of war and peace, and some of his most profound advice can also be found in very slightly different words in the writings of Confucius and Lao Tzu.<sup>4</sup>

Some world history theorists conclude that rising powers must conflict with declining powers, and *in extremis* that wars are thus **inevitable** during such times. One label for this concept is "Thucydides's Trap." China is obviously rising, and the USA is obviously declining. So, **if**<sup>5</sup> the trap theory is true, it suggests a grim prediction, since full-scale war between these military giants could wipe out civilization in the Northern Hemisphere. Even our species could be at risk if the most extreme, biological or nuclear WMD scenarios came true.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, sages of war and peace say 'consult with us' about such huge decisions on life or death for billions of people and possibly for civilization itself. They cry out, 'We have seen a lot of slaughter, so we can speak from our graves about wisdom and war if you will just consult us.' China wants to rise softly enough to not trigger war with the US. Still (naturally) China seeks to rise, while the US (naturally) is very reluctant to cede the lead role among nations. Therefore, serious people in both Washington and Beijing ponder this dilemma every day. Then there are related issues like our cousin<sup>7</sup> Kim Jong-un, pressures on Japan, South Korea and Taiwan to obtain WMD,<sup>8</sup> existential challenges presented by nuclear powers in the Middle East,<sup>9</sup> and millions of angry young men in many countries who would love to have some WMD ... to use. We are searching for wisdom in a world gone mad, but that is better than despair or indifference.

### The Challenges of Translation and Interpretation

At some point in any analysis like this, the manifold complications of interpreting ancient text in languages foreign to American, English language-speaking authors must be noted. We do that immediately, using the "Tao te Ching" of Lao Tzu for our example. First, we are completely

dependent on translations by others. Second, even great scholars of literature differ on many important points, none of which we can adjudicate. For example, was Lao Tzu an individual, historic man, or a label applied to a collection of ancient sayings assembled by many authors? Was Lao Tzu, if an actual man, contemporary with Confucius as tradition claims, or did he arrive centuries later? How does one in a far-away land interpret ambiguous passages, which abound in the “Tao te Ching?” How can we evaluate contradictions? There are many. Dates, context, and linguistic nuance can greatly affect such judgments. So far as we can tell, even Chinese experts do not know for sure when this classic work was actually written, or by whom.<sup>10, 11, 12</sup> Are passages in the original order, or scrambled by various fates? Most scholars agree that much ancient literature has been ‘corrupted’ by additions, subtractions, and other changes caused by editors or copiers over time. Which words came from the Master, and which were added by students later? Were words subtracted by powerful critics, or ignorant editors? This often happens if rulers do not like the words of sages, and many editors cannot resist opportunities to “improve” on others’ writing. Since we are quite unqualified to answer such questions, but face profound dangers that beg for wisdom from sages, we have chosen to press on as best we can using English-language sources for each book listed at the end. We have also chosen to interpret from time to time, as best we can from our tiny base of experience and learning, just because we must. We encourage any reader to improve on this, and to correct any errors of fact you find.

## Introduction

In Book I, line 23 of the classic “History of the Peloponnesian War,” Greek historian Thucydides concluded that: ***“What made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear this caused in Sparta.”***<sup>13</sup> He is certainly entitled to that opinion, and deserves honors since he wrote the only extant, detailed description of that very important historic war. But this remains an opinion that can be disputed.<sup>14</sup> And parsing out obvious, proximate causes or triggering events from ephemeral, ultimate, psychological or system level ‘causes’ can be very tedious and open to many, well informed but different opinions.<sup>15</sup>

Still, according to Thucydides, fear of rising neighbors was the most important, if least publicly discussed, ‘cause’ of that epochal war. What might Sun Tzu say? He addresses how to fight wars, mainly, with exceptional clarity. But Sun Tzu also offers some sage advice for leaders. In his incomparable “Art of War,” written sometime in the fifth century B.C.E., Sun Tzu wrote:<sup>16</sup>

**“Generally, in war the best policy is to take a state intact; to ruin it is inferior to this. To capture the enemy’s army is better than to destroy it; to take intact a battalion, a company, or a five-man squad is better than to destroy them. For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”** Book 3: 1-3.

Sun Tzu’s words have been republished for over 2500 years, long after the emperors he worked for were forgotten, because unlike most of his peers, Sun Tzu was wise as well as skilled. You can see that he would encourage keeping the army strong and the state secure by preserving peace, more than by prevailing in constant wars. If Greek politicians had followed Sun Tzu’s advice, they might have been spared the degradation of their peoples and of the ancient virtues

they had used to build their civilization. Instead of moderation, they refined slaughter and barbarism. If they had not destroyed themselves, they probably would have been strong enough to defeat Alexander the Great of Macedonia who conquered them shortly after. Instead, Sparta, Athens and their many allies destroyed each other, and degraded civic virtues that had sustained their civilization for generations. Thucydides describes that degradation thus.<sup>17</sup>

**“Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal supporter; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question incapacity to act on any. Frantic violence became the attribute of manliness; cautious plotting a justifiable means of self-defense. The advocate of extreme measures was always trustworthy; his opponent a man to be suspected. To succeed in a plot was to have a shrewd head, to divine a plot still shrewder; but to try to provide against having to do either was to break up your party and to be afraid of your adversaries. In short, to forestall an intending criminal, or to suggest the idea of a crime where it was lacking was equally commended, until even blood became a weaker tie than party, from the superior readiness of those united by the latter to dare everything without reserve; for such associations sought not the blessings derivable from established institutions but were formed by ambition to overthrow them; and the confidence of their members in each other rested less on any religious sanction than upon complicity in crime.”**

Later in the same section, Thucydides adds: “Love of power, operating through greed and through personal ambition, was the cause of all these evils. To this must be added the fanaticism which came into play once the struggle had broken out.” *Fanaticism* is important, because this is among the most dangerous transformations that war can induce. It caused the Greeks to kill each other until they were weak enough to be conquered by neighbors. Fu Sheng (符生) might be an example from Chinese history, but he was apparently so brutal and incompetent that he lasted only two years. There are others in the history of all great nations.

Sun Tzu replies:<sup>18</sup>

**“If not in the interests of the state, do not act. If you cannot succeed, do not use troops. If you are not in danger, do not fight. A sovereign cannot raise an army because he is enraged, nor can a general fight because he is resentful. For while an angered man may again be happy, and a resentful man again be pleased, a state that has perished cannot be restored, nor can the dead be brought back to life. Therefore, the enlightened ruler is prudent and the good general is warned against rash action. Thus the state is kept secure and the army preserved.”**  
Book 12: 17-19.

Apparently, both of these sages urged prudence among citizens and caution among high leaders, even when their power is very great. They knew that power can disappear very quickly if leaders are unwise, and that resulting chaos can be incredibly destructive. What do other sages say?

**Lao Tzu**

Scholars write that Lao Tzu was much less influential than Confucius in the evolution of Chinese philosophy, if he even was an historic man.<sup>19</sup> They also say that Lao Tzu and the “Tao te Ching” remain significant today, which one cannot say about most writings over 2300 years old. Two of his most interesting comments about war and peace, to me,<sup>20</sup> are his first words, and nearly his last. At the beginning, Lao Tzu writes: **“The Way that can be spoken of, is not the constant Way.”** This can address the fanaticism that Thucydides saw as his peoples destroyed each other. It can also speak to the bitter religious wars of today, if those who truly think that a “god” loves *them* more than any other will hear. There may very well be a “God,” but so far as I can tell it loves everyone, equally, period.<sup>21</sup> This is a very unpopular idea to demagogues and fanatics.<sup>22</sup>

In section 193, almost at the very end of his work, Lao Tzu writes: **“Reduce the size and population of the state,”** and **“Ensure that even though the people have tools of war for a troop or battalion, they will not use them ...”** The first phrase has profound implications for the modern context. No nation has lived the goal of reducing population growth so that prosperity and peace could follow more than modern China. China has thrived therefore, but with growing strength, it begins to bully neighbors. Down that path lies destruction, as I read Lao Tzu. The second phrase calls for arming the common people for self-defense, but for defense only, and arranging affairs so that they have little desire and no need to attack neighbors, near or far. Both of these are key principles for surviving the developing global crisis<sup>23</sup> that everyone under Heaven feels today.

Lao Tzu elaborates on this in sections 72 a & b:<sup>24</sup> (a) **“It is because arms are instruments of ill omen, and because there are Things that detest them that one who has the Way does not abide by their use. (b) The gentleman gives precedence to the left when at home but to the right when he goes to war. Arms are instruments of ill omen, not the instruments of the gentleman. When one is compelled to use them, it is best to do so without relish. There is no glory in victory, and to glorify it despite this is to exalt in the killing of men. One who exalts in the killing of men will never have his way in the empire.”**

Lao Tzu is rather like Sun Tzu in this respect. Prudence was his first word for rulers, like benevolence was for Confucius. It appears that Lao Tzu prized nature and peace over glory, war and transient wealth. It also appears that he (or they) never sought personal power, which is the way of true sages in the West, like Jesus. Perhaps that is why Lao Tzu is less popular today than others. Peacemakers are often marginalized, rejected, and sometimes they are killed. Witness Jesus, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and others I should not name lest we embarrass their living murderers. Tyrants always fear criticism and talent. This is why they repress dissent so fiercely. Free thinkers are fertilizers and catalysts for civilization, but tyrants fear questions and suggestions for improvement. Wise leaders cultivate constructive criticism, and encourage rethinking ancient assumptions. Thus has science advanced throughout the ages. If a civilization is flourishing, it may be able to afford killing some of its best and brightest citizens. But if a civilization faces stagnation or near death, as they eventually do,<sup>25</sup> the arts of peace and the values of diversity may suddenly acquire merits hitherto unseen by leaders infected by hubris.<sup>26</sup>

**Confucius**<sup>27, 28</sup>

In the West, the legend of Confucian influence on modern Chinese thinking is profound. So we read him over 40 years ago, but did not understand much. Today, chances for war between our nations makes learning more imperative. So we read again, and learn that Confucius was never a general or an emperor, but rather a scholar and philosopher, whose wisest quotes read more like Jesus than Sun Tzu. Indeed the “Golden Rule” appears twice in the Analects as translated by D.C. Lau, in chapter 12: 2, and chapter 15: 24. We also observe in chapter 7: 21, a student writes, “The topics the Master did not speak of were prodigies, force, disorder and gods.”<sup>29, 30</sup>

So I will comment on a few of Kongzi’s (孔子)<sup>31</sup> pearls of wisdom after reflecting on Dr. Lau’s summary of Confucian thought. Lau wrote, “The ultimate purpose of government is the welfare of the common people (普通人的福利). This is the most basic principle in Confucianism and has remained unchanged throughout the ages.”<sup>32</sup> Dr. Lau also lists for Western students some cardinal virtues of Confucianism, to wit:<sup>33</sup>

Benevolence	(ren)	仁	
Wisdom	(zhihui)	智慧	
Courage	(yongqi)	勇气	
Trustworthiness	(chengxin)	诚信	
Reverence	(zunjing)	尊敬	and possibly
Recognition of Duty	(yiwu)	义务, or 承认义务	

Well, these are certainly virtues of value for any human on this earth. At least five would be recognized instantly by Warriors of the ancient kind, like Sun Tzu, and by the best philosophical martial artists of the modern era, like Morihei Ueshiba, the Japanese founder of Aikido.<sup>34</sup>

Elsewhere in “The Analects” available to me, I note especially the following annotated quotes.

“The Master said, ‘It is not easy to find a man who can study for three years without thinking about earning a salary.’”<sup>35</sup> I have found two, but there is no doubt that they are rare. They are rare even today, when ordinary men live longer, eat better, travel farther, and are arguably richer than Emperors and Kings from just a century ago, much less thousands of years ago.

“The Master said, ‘Make it your guiding principle to do your best for others and to be trustworthy in what you say.’”<sup>36</sup>

We have already noted the Confucian version of the “Golden Rule,” “Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire”<sup>37</sup> but we also note later in that same chapter: “The Master said, ‘The gentleman helps others to realize what is good in them; he does not help them to realize what is bad in them. The small man does the opposite.’” This appears to me extremely wise advice for the highest leaders under Heaven, which is also a concept that Sun Tzu and other mystic Warriors recognize worldwide. We must come to understand much better what “t’ien ming” (or 天命) means to modern Chinese people.

The thirteenth chapter of The Analects has two related quotes that bear on use of violence by governments. First, “The Master said, ‘How true is the saying that after a state has been ruled for 100 years by good men it is possible to get the better of cruelty and to do away with killing.’”<sup>38</sup> Then, in close proximity, “The Master said, ‘To send the common people to war untrained is to throw them away.’”<sup>39</sup> And finally, near the very end of The Analects, “The Master said, ‘To impose the death penalty without first trying to reform it is to be cruel;’”<sup>40</sup> Kongzi does not appear to be the harsh authoritarian he is often presented as in the West, notwithstanding his many other comments about filial duty and respect for authority in general.

There is no doubt that “respect for authority” is good for communities. Within reason, if they do not become tyrannical police-states. Aristotle (another ancient, but very wise Greek) claimed that even the best virtues, carried to extremes, can become dangerous and destructive vices.<sup>41</sup> Thus “order” is a virtue. But too much order is totalitarianism, a vice, and too little order is anarchic chaos, another vice. Aristotle claimed that all great virtues were middle positions between such extremes. For another example, too much “courage” leads to foolish recklessness, while too little “courage” leads to cowardice. Both are dangerous extremes. True virtue lies in the middle. This is called by scholars of Greek philosophy, Aristotle’s “Doctrine of the Mean.”

中庸

Wikipedia claims that Confucius had his own version, called Zhongyong, or 中庸<sup>42</sup>

## Carl von Clausewitz

A Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) is known today mostly for a book written after the Napoleonic wars, and published in 1832 titled “*Vom Kriege*” or “On War.”<sup>43</sup> While Sun Tzu is often described in the West as a master of the indirect approach, Clausewitz is considered a master of frontal and massive attacks. His reputation was diminished by experience from World War I, where about one-tenth of European males died when mass, frontal attacks faced modern weapons like machine guns, rapid-fire artillery, and chemical weapons (the latter now banned from civilized armies). The 9-months, serial slaughter at Gallipoli, Turkey, in 1915 stands as a symbol for ‘modern’ generals taking Clausewitz’s advice too literally for too long.

Here is a bad example. In Book 1, Chapter 1, Section 3, paragraph 1, Clausewitz writes: “Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat the enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war.”<sup>44</sup> Pleasant as it sounds, this is a fallacy that must be exposed. War is such a dangerous business that mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst.” Sun Tzu agreed that excessive compassion could be a weakness for a General,<sup>45</sup> but I doubt he would ever have agreed that the slaughters of the “total wars” World War I and World War II were a good use of armies. Neither would Confucius, as I read his Analects, where the welfare of common people is very important.

In paragraph three of this same Chapter, Clausewitz repeats, “To introduce into the philosophy of War a principle of moderation would be an absurdity.” Then, in section 24, he writes: “We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy, but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse carried on with other means.”<sup>46</sup>

Despite these harsh conclusions, one can find some small sense of moral dimensions in war in Book 3, where Clausewitz writes: “The moral elements are among the most important in war.”<sup>47</sup> This compares with Sun Tzu’s comments in Book 1 of his Art of War. From that chapter on Estimates, Sun Tzu writes (I paraphrase close sections) 3: “The first of these factors is moral influence, ...” Then in section 4: “By moral influence I mean that which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders, so that they will accompany them in life and unto death without fear of mortal peril.” Then, in section 7: “By command I mean the general’s qualities of wisdom, sincerity, humanity, courage and strictness.” Clausewitz writes elsewhere that his concept of morality includes a “genius” for war that can ignore all rules, because his art is somehow above rules.<sup>48</sup> That path leads, in my opinion, to ruin, for both armies, generals (genius or otherwise) and nations. It is a trail of hubris I have witnessed, and even marched on many times.<sup>49</sup>

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of China versus the USA today, as they relate to Current Crises**

Having consulted these sages of war, and occasionally of peace as well, I must now speculate on what this means for the clash of rising Chinese civilization and declining American civilization in the modern era. This is risky business, because it is my duty to be very honest with you all, notwithstanding any person’s sensitivities about issues of life and death. My apologies in advance to anyone who is offended by discussing taboo topics for the good of everyone’s children, and for the Human Civilization, which transcends all lesser versions of “civilization.”

First let me admit that my nation, which I love, has committed every crime conceivable during its brief 241 years existence, including genocide of native peoples, torture, rape and slaughter of millions, some guilty of war crimes as in World War II, others innocent as the dawn. One reason is the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that go far beyond nuclear weapons, and another is deep corruptions that allowed our national command to invade countries on false pretenses, like Iraq in March, 2003. Just listing the 73 countries my nation has intervened in since the Korean War of 1950-53 would take more space than time allows here, and that is before discussing our covert methods and the evidence required to prove their tactical utilities.

My point is not self-punishment. China also has a list of crimes accumulated over 4000 to 5000 years of history. Neither of us are innocent, collectively. Both cultures also suffer from severe “exceptionalism” or beliefs that we are superior. To avoid premature deaths of billions rather than mere millions of innocents, I must now deal with the extreme hubris that “great powers” often display. “Exceptionalism” is very dangerous, yet common as dirt. Americans feel very exceptional, as do Chinese mandarins, Japanese samurai and even Korean patriots, who observe they have survived in between China and Japan for millennia also. My America never admits to imperialist behaviors, yet it has intervened militarily in more countries than any other in recent history, and has been in a state of near-perpetual war most of my adult life. At least 6 million people elsewhere have died young therefore, probably many more depending on how one counts casualties (if at all). China claims that it has never been “expansionist,” which is laughably inaccurate according to Tibetans and the Uighur, and the peoples of Vietnam, Korea and other neighbors who remember border disputes, the ancient tribute system, and its modern analogues.

Weapons of Mass Destruction have changed all that. If leaders truly comprehend what WMD mean, the days of nine kowtows are over, never to return. So are the days of “Manifest Destiny” and American imperialism. The “Century of Humiliation” is also over, as it should be, never to return. We must find a better balance, for the good of our nations and for survival of civilization. One of the inventors of nuclear power, our most famous physicist Albert Einstein, memorably said: “The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything, except our ways of thinking.”<sup>50</sup> All that was before the new genetic technologies could be applied to biological weapons, which could, in theory, kill everyone quite reliably. I am a geneticist; believe me, this is true.

It should be clear to all by now that either China or the USA (among others) could blow up the entire world fighting over who is biggest, baddest and dumbest. Or, wiser leaders could chose “The Way” which has been written of and spoken about for millennia, in many languages.

We bring very different strengths to this dilemma. The collective wisdom of China, and the long term, patient worldviews this promotes, are essential to create an international ethos able to survive another century, much less millennia. The individual genius of America, and the ‘can do’ attitude that believes all problems are solvable if ‘free people’ can approach them in diverse ways is also essential, with its correlates of “human rights” and “rule of laws” accumulated over millennia of thought about how to coexist with others in non-hierarchical ways.

Today, China can build a “bullet train” in months, while California dreams of building one in 15 years, maybe. China leads the world in deployment of solar technology, in particular low cost photovoltaics, and makes more steel and concrete than anyone else on earth. But California far outperforms China in consideration of environmental costs, and creative entrepreneurship, so it has far more pristine environment, far fewer deaths due to pollution, and the phenomenon called Silicon Valley. Both of our countries are deeply complicit in destruction of the earth’s living system which sustains us all, peasant and prince alike. In fact, our living system is being killed right now, as witness acidification of the oceans and the sixth “great extinction.” Which wizard of the East or West thought that this was a good formula for “Everything under Heaven?”

Today, we must consider things like ‘who will put a net on Kim Jong-un before he incites a US President to incinerate his nation, spreading death to all near neighbors and perhaps the northern hemisphere?’ And, ‘who will put a net on Mr. Trump before he seeks more applause by starting a discretionary war for entertainment or other egotistic reasons?’ There are many consequences of inaction. South Korea watches and reacts, and as you well know, Japan has tons of weapons-ready plutonium and the skills required to weaponize that in months (perhaps hours if worst-case scenarios are true).<sup>51</sup> Taiwan has similar incentives, yet we are told that its freedom will never be safe, because China desires dominance so passionately. Who will guarantee freedom of trade throughout the South China Sea, so essential to so many Asian and other economies? Will it be the USA, or must it be China, or can the two gorillas set aside their military and cultural desires to be undisputed ‘king of the hill’ and share that burden somehow? Do not assume that either country would see its Navy destroyed without unleashing their most powerful weapons, probably destroying Everything under Heaven including most of our peoples.

Then there are the deep corruptions that cripple both of our nations and the world of high politics in general. Believe us, common people know this is a poison to us all.<sup>52</sup> Yet authorities pretend



that corruption is unsolvable, or at best somebody else's problem. Good luck with this; it is a stinky, dead-fish problem. But it cripples solutions to other great problems, so we must Press On!

The children of Tiananmen Square beg you to reconsider this kind of death thinking, the desire to dominate at any cost, as do our children from Kent State who were killed by our soldiers in 1970, and many others much less famous who died during civil rights movements in America. A better balance between the state and its citizens is necessary everywhere if we are to endure as a species. WMD make retribution available to ever smaller actors. Crushing individuals because they ask forbidden questions is going the way of nine kowtows and Manifest Destinies. A better balance between humankind and the living system of the earth is also necessary. These can only be achieved by wise, prudent leadership, which is sensitive to ancient ways, but open to the profound changes necessary to turn from fat, old caterpillars into beautiful new butterflies.

The Lakota Sioux offer some words of wisdom for this dilemma, specifically *Mitakwe Asin*, or "We are all Relatives." This was a concise appeal for harmony among disparate clans of the Sioux, but could it possibly be true? Geneticists have proven this twice, by the arithmetic of population genetics and by the physical evidence of genomic sequencing. If we are indeed "all relatives," this makes the casual slaughter of wars even more immoral and unwise. How could the Lakota Sioux discover this, without "genetic science" or even writing? One might infer that the Universe (or The Way which guides it) has means of teaching that we do not yet understand. How did the 'Golden Rule' find its way into spiritual teachings all around the world?

"Competition brings out the Best, but Cooperation brings out the Most," claimed a wise dentist named Dr. Ellis. What a concise perspective on main strengths of the West and the East, which should be fused to face that developing global crisis which threatens Everything under Heaven.

Finally, both nations should pay more attention to the concepts of global governance and reform of our institutions. Today, each nation flouts international laws despite "solemn pledges" to honor them and their institutions, like the World Court, the International Criminal Court, the UN, and Treaties to empower them like the "Law of the Sea Treaty" which the US wrote but never signed or ratified. The guiding principle should be "what is best for international civilization and the seventh-generation<sup>53</sup> of our descendants?" not just transient national interests.

Therefore, I urge the national command authorities of both China and the USA to consider these words and perspectives of ancient sages as they deal with "clashing" civilizations. Civilizational *encounters* can be very fertile times, if blended and harmonized by wise leadership. Or they can be the end of "Everything under Heaven." The Hebrews alleged that their God put before us life and death, but urged us always to choose life.<sup>54</sup> And Jesus said "Blessed are the Peacemakers," not the warmongers.<sup>55</sup> As always, what you do is up to you.

So I close by restating the wisest words I have found after studying ancient philosophers and practitioners regarding what to do when civilizations clash. They are, from Sun Tzu:

**"If not in the interests of the state, do not act. If you cannot succeed, do not use troops. If you are not in danger, do not fight. A sovereign cannot raise an army because he is enraged, nor can a general fight because he is resentful. For while an angered man may again be happy, and a resentful man again be pleased, a**

**state that has perished cannot be restored, nor can the dead be brought back to life. Therefore, the enlightened ruler is prudent and the good general is warned against rash action. Thus the state is kept secure and the army preserved.”**

Book 12: 17-19. Followed by:

**“Generally, in war the best policy is to take a state intact; to ruin it is inferior to this. To capture the enemy’s army is better than to destroy it; to take intact a battalion, a company, or a five-man squad is better than to destroy them. For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”** Book 3: 1-3.

In Chinese, as best I can determine, this is:

míng zhǔ lǜ zhī , liáng jiāng xiū zhī 。

明主虑之，良将修之。

fēi lì bù dòng , fēi de bù yòng , fēi wēi bù zhàn

非利不动，非得不用，非危不战。

zhǔ bù kě yǐ nù ér xìng shī , jiāng bù kě yǐ yùn ér zhì zhàn 。

主不可以怒而兴师，将不可以愠而致战。

nù kě yǐ fù xǐ , yùn kě yǐ fù yuè ,

怒可以复喜，愠可以复悦，

wáng guó bù kě yǐ fù cún , sǐ zhě bù kě yǐ fù shēng 。

亡国不可以复存，死者不可以复生。

gù míng jūn shèn zhī , liáng jiāng jǐng zhī , cǐ ān guó quán jūn zhī dào yě 。

故明君慎之，良将警之，此安国全军之道也。

Followed by:

fū yòng bīng zhī fǎ , quán guó wéi shàng , pò guó cì zhī

“夫用兵之法，全国为上，破国次之；

quán jūn wéi shàng , pò jūn cì zhī ; quán lǚ wéi shàng , pò lǚ cì zhī

全军为上，破军次之；全旅为上，破旅次之；

quán zú wéi shàng , pò zú cì zhī ; quán wǔ wéi shàng , pò wǔ cì zhī

全卒为上，破卒次之；全伍为上，破伍次之。”

shì gù bǎi zhàn bǎi shèng , fēi shàn zhī shàn yě ;

是故百战百胜，非善之善也；

bù zhàn ér qū rén zhī bīng , shàn zhī shàn zhě

不战而屈人之兵，善之善者也。

<sup>1</sup> “Axial age” refers to the period from ~ 800-300 BCE, when new ways of thinking appeared in Persia, India, China and the Greco-Roman world in religion and philosophy. The term is ascribed to German philosopher Karl Jaspers. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axial\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axial_Age) for more details.

<sup>2</sup> Allison, Graham, Destined for War: Can American and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap? Houghton Mifflin, 2017. Prof. Allison is credited with creating or at least popularizing the term “Thucydides’ Trap” in a September 24, 2015 Atlantic article followed by the 2017 book cited above. He concludes that the odds of avoiding catastrophic war are only about 1 in 4, based on 16 historic cases, but that avoiding the catastrophic war remains the only rational option at this time. Then Allison urges President Trump to play “nuclear chicken” with China (below).

<sup>3</sup> Allison, Graham, “Playing Chicken with China,” in the Wall Street Journal, August 21, 2017, p. A15. Here Graham urges playing (nuclear) chicken with China to force China to restrain North Korea, based on his observation that others used a Cold War strategy called “nuclear chicken” to get things done in our past, but that no one has blown up the world ... yet. So, he urges President Trump to roll dice on the future of all humankind when faced with current frictions with China. When theory, or just love of abstract geopolitics, overcomes prudence, practice and experiences of real consequences of actual wars, everything under Heaven is at risk, in this author’s opinion.

<sup>4</sup> The “Golden Rule” can be found in nearly identical forms in many ancient writings, among them “The Analects” of Confucius, in Book 12, section 2 and Book 15, section 24, “Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.” In the West, this is often attributed to Jesus (in the Bible, Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31) but Jesus referred to earlier writings of the Hebrews in Leviticus 19:18 which was probably written even earlier than The Analects. Some Biblical scholars reserve the term “Golden” to only Judeo-Christian versions, but I consider this imprudent. Which came first is trivial (to me) compared to the fact that wise people around the world carried these thoughts on.

<sup>5</sup> Emphasis on the word “if.” Fortunately, social science theories seldom turn out to be very accurate, because they must simplify incredibly complex phenomena. The ‘inevitability’ of a civilization ending Armageddon has been predicted for millennia, and proven wrong thousands of times in human history. So far. You might also consider ...

<sup>6</sup> “ISIS and Apocalypse: Some Comparisons with End Times Thinking Elsewhere and a Theory,” by Andregg, M. in Comparative Civilizations Review, Vol. 75, 2016, findable at: <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol75/iss75/8/>.

<sup>7</sup> Geneticists have proven in several ways that all human beings are related to each other. The Lakota Sioux discovered this in some entirely different way, as illustrated by a phrase *Mitakwe Asin*, or “We are all Relatives.”

<sup>8</sup> WMD stands for Weapons of Mass Destruction. We will use both forms in this essay on civilizational survival.

<sup>9</sup> The most obvious of which is Israel, whose fear of Iran, of Islam in general, and of Palestinians in particular may eventually result in nuclear proliferation throughout the Middle East. Or a nuclear war triggered by “terrorism.”

<sup>10</sup> For example, the translation of the Tao te Ching by D.C. Lau in 1963 is significantly different than the translation by his student Roger T. Ames (and David L. Hall) in 2003, titled A Philosophical Translation of the Dao de Jing: Making this Life Significant, partly because of archaeological finds in 1973 (Mawangdui) and especially Guodian in 1993 that produced the oldest extant bamboo strips of “Daodejing” including 14 new ones they call “The Great One Gives Birth to the Waters.” Despite their close proximity as student and teacher separated by merely 40 years, these authors use different spellings, different words, and significantly different philosophical lenses and literary styles. To these I would add here another “philosophical translation” by Ashok Kumar Malhotra of SUNY Oneonta, titled Wisdom of the Tao Te Ching: The Code of a Spiritual Warrior, Oneonta, NY: Oneonta Philosophy Studies, 2006. Where Ames is very abstract, pedantic and occasionally opaque, with long, flowery commentaries on every chapter, Malhotra is the opposite, as brief as possible, using the simplest English language possible, because his objective was making the great text accessible to ordinary students instead of just graduate philosophers.

<sup>11</sup> Ames, Roger T. and David L. Hall, A Philosophical Translation of the Dao de Jing: Making this Life Significant, PUB and DATE

<sup>12</sup> Malhotra, Ashok Kumar, Wisdom of the Tao Te Ching: The Code of a Spiritual Warrior, SUNY Oneonta, NY: Oneonta Philosophy Studies, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, translated by Rex Warner in 1954 (London: Penguin, 1986 ed.). This most quoted passage of this classic reference occurs on page 49 of the 1986 edition, Book 1: 23.

<sup>14</sup> “The Peloponnesian War – Causes of the Conflict” by N.S. Gill, on ThoughtCo. March 2, 2017, findable at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-peloponnesian-war-causes-120200>

<sup>15</sup> Andregg, Michael, On the Causes of War, St. Paul, MN: Ground Zero Minnesota, 1997, 1999, 2007, especially Chapter 6 on “Causation is Complex: Ultimate vs. Proximate Causes, and Triggering Events,” pp. 22-25. This book can be accessed at:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5750629760b5e9d6697be6cd/t/59963a81d482e9edaffa67ed/1503017604395/On+the+Causes+of+War.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> One recent commentary on Sun Tzu's classic work was published in a book called Strategic Studies: A Reader, edited by Thomas G. Mahnken and Joseph A. Maiolo, Routledge Press, London, 2008. However, I find the translation by Samuel Griffith (two citations below) to be far superior, so I use it for all Sun Tzu quotes here.

<sup>17</sup> Thucydides, *ibid*, Book 3: 82, pp. 242-243.

<sup>18</sup> Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Book 12: 17-19, as translated by Samuel B. Griffith in the Oxford University Press edition of 1963, London, UK.

<sup>19</sup> Lao Tzu, Tao te Ching, translated by DC Lau in 1963, London, UK: Penguin Classics, 1978, especially Appendix 1 on "The Problem of Authorship" pp. 147-162.

<sup>20</sup> Lao Tzu, Tao te Ching, *ibid* 1:1, p 57. It bears emphasis that "most interesting, **to me**" is a reservation that should be applied to every opinion here on writings of far-away sages from thousands of years ago. Picking and choosing which parts seem wise in modern context is a method fraught with analytic perils. Despite such perils, I interpret anyway, especially lines that I have remembered for 40 years because they spoke to me as noted. See below also.

<sup>21</sup> This is of course, just this author's opinion. But some opinions are necessary when interpreting deep philosophy,

<sup>22</sup> British philosopher Bertrand Russell was allegedly quoted in a book called A Word a Day: "The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts." In any event, fanatics have corrupted many great thinkers by exaggerating their wisdom into certainties of hubris.

<sup>23</sup> "The Developing Global Crisis" is a term we have used in many intelligence and military conferences. One example is: "*The Developing Global Crisis and the Current Wave of Migrant/Refugees Heading for Europe*" delivered to the 21st "Intelligence in the Knowledge Society" conference of the National Intelligence Academy of Romania "*Mihai Viteazul*", on October 16, 2016. Its major elements are population pressure, rising authoritarian law and militant religion, ever-growing income inequality, and climate change or gradual destruction of earth's living system. This paper can be accessed at: <https://www.ceeol.com/content-files/document-570738.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Lao Tzu, Tao te Ching, *ibid*, Book 1: 72a, 72b, p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> See The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis, by Carroll Quigley, first edition by Macmillan in New York, 1961, especially his chapter on the "Decay Phase" of civilizations. A relevant quote from that suggests chilling parallels to current conditions in the USA: "The Stage of Decay is a period of acute economic depression, declining standards of living, civil wars between the various vested interests and growing illiteracy. The society grows weaker and weaker. Vain efforts are made to stop the wastage by legislation. But the decline continues. The religious, intellectual, social and political levels of the society begin to lose the allegiance of the masses of the people on a large scale. New religious movements begin to sweep over the society. There is a growing reluctance to fight for the society or even to support it by paying taxes."

<sup>26</sup> "Hubris" is one of the truly great words the Greeks passed down to us, meaning in English roughly "overweening pride," especially the kind that is corrosive of wisdom and hostile to correction until ignorance gets its reward.

<sup>27</sup> Confucius, The Analects, as translated by James Legge, is available online at:

<http://www.limpidsoft.com/a5print/confucius.pdf>. However, as usual I will prefer an older and much more cited scholarly book version as cited below in endnote 28, and for the rest of my citations of Analects' text.

<sup>28</sup> Confucius, The Analects, translated by DC Lau, London: Penguin Classics, 1963, 1978. Note that the same professor translated both The Analects and the Tao te Ching for Penguin, so I accept professor Lau's judgment on the general merits and popularity of these two schools of thought in China, at least in 1963.

<sup>29</sup> Confucius, The Analects, *ibid*, chapter 7: 21, p. 88.

<sup>30</sup> Another translation of The Analects, by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. in 1998, rendered this: "The Master had nothing to say about strange happenings, the use of force, disorder, or the spirits." By any translation, the Master (Confucius) did not like to talk about the use of force, which suggests to me that he disapproved of it.

<sup>31</sup> "Kongzi" is Chinese for "Confucius" in English.

<sup>32</sup> Confucius, The Analects, *ibid*, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Confucius, The Analects, *ibid*, p. 22 and 26.

<sup>34</sup> Ueshiba, Morihei, (the Japanese founder of Aikido), The Art of Peace. Shambhala Press, 1992.

<sup>35</sup> Confucius, The Analects, *ibid*, chapter 8: 12, p. 94.

<sup>36</sup> Confucius, The Analects, *ibid*, chapter 9: 25, p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> Confucius, The Analects, *ibid*, chapter 12: 2, p. 112.

<sup>38</sup> Confucius, The Analects, *ibid*, chapter 13: 11, p. 120.

<sup>39</sup> Confucius, The Analects, *ibid*, chapter 13: 30, p. 123.

<sup>40</sup> Confucius, The Analects, *ibid*, chapter 20: 2, p. 160.

<sup>41</sup> Nicomachean Ethics, Book II, by Aristotle the Greek, written around 340 BCE, again during the axial age. The point made here is generally called the "Doctrine of the Mean." Virtues lie between vices of extremes.

<sup>42</sup> Doctrine of the Mean, from Wikipedia, accessible at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctrine\\_of\\_the\\_Mean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctrine_of_the_Mean)

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<sup>43</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von, On War, (“Vom Kriege” in original German), first published in 1832 by Dummiere Verlag. My version was edited by Anatol Rapaport, and published by Penguin Books, in London, UK, 1982. One can also explore a fully on-line source: <https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/OnWar1873/TOC.htm>

<sup>44</sup> This quote is from Book 1, Ch. 1, section 3, pg. 102. It appears to reference a difference of opinion with Sun Tzu.

<sup>45</sup> Sun Tzu, The Art of War, *ibid*, Book 8, 22-23.

<sup>46</sup> Clausewitz, On War, *ibid*, Book 1, Chapter 1, section 24, pg. 119. This is the most quoted sentence in On War.

<sup>47</sup> Clausewitz, On War, *ibid*, Book 3, Chapter 3, section 1, pg. 251.

<sup>48</sup> Clausewitz, On War, *ibid*, Book 3, Chapter 3 entire. This chapter, titled “Moral Forces,” contains a strange mixture of deep admiration for “moral forces” in war with a sublime hubris that only geniuses of war can understand those moral forces, and why they absolve one of all “so-called rules.” He claims such genius is “above all rules.”

<sup>49</sup> Having considered these sages carefully, Sun Tzu appears the wisest, so I encourage rereading his quotes on p. 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Einstein, Albert, from the article “Atomic Education Urged by Einstein” in The New York Times, May 25, 1946.

<sup>51</sup> The Wall Street Journal editorial board observed on Aug. 30, 2017, p. A-14, that: “Japan has enough plutonium from its civilian nuclear reactors for more than 1,000 nuclear warheads, and it has the know-how to build them in months. This prospect should alarm China, which could suddenly face a nuclear-armed regional rival.”

<sup>52</sup> An “International Consortium of Investigative Journalists” published many stories in November, 2017, based on hacked documents from tax dodgers called the “Paradise Papers.” This was an even greater scandal than preceding “Panama Papers” derived from a single law firm that specialized in creating tax havens for ultra-rich persons and corporations. A review of “Paradise Papers” can be found at: <https://www.icij.org/investigations/paradise-papers/>

<sup>53</sup> A principle derived from the Iroquois Confederacy, a Native American group that produced their own democracy.

<sup>54</sup> Bible, Deuteronomy 30: 19.

<sup>55</sup> Bible, Matthew 5: 9.